

Immigrants at Home: Revolution, Nationalism, and Anti-Chinese Sentiment in Mexico,  
1910-1935

A Senior Honors Thesis

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by

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Source: George T. Summerlin to Sec. of State, (Jan. 6, 1923), The National Archives Record Group 59, 812.911/142, enclosure, The Ohio State University Libraries.

Map 1

1922 Map of Mexico

## ABSTRACT

*Immigrants at Home* explores the history of Chinese citizens who immigrated to Mexico primarily during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Examining this subject from a social perspective, the paper first seeks to elaborate upon the process of negotiation that took place between these immigrants and dominant Mexican society. Chinese immigrants initially succeeded in modifying the roles prescribed for them by Mexican political thought, and the cultural agency that they displayed in both their sexual and economic practices made life in Mexico tolerable and even prosperous.<sup>1</sup> However, following the onslaught of the Mexican Revolution in 1910 and its concordant ideologies of nationalism, xenophobia, and racism, social discourse demanded that the Chinese immigrants abandon many of their survival strategies. Faced with violence and discrimination, many of these immigrants undertook a final renegotiation of their roles in Mexico by leaving the country with their Mexican wives and families. The paper attempts to synchronize these events into a broad examination of the factors and circumstances that allow particular adaptation and negotiation strategies to both succeed and change at divergent historical moments.

### **Methodology**

The work draws on a wealth of historical research and resources. The most significant of these sources are correspondences of U.S. Consular Agents in Mexico, which are available in the National Archives Records Group 59. However, the work of other scholars also proved crucial to the completion of this research. For instance, studies by Evelyn Hu-Dehart that analyzed the

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<sup>1</sup> In her introduction to *Cultural Agency in the Americas*, Doris Sommer defines cultural agency as “social contributions through creative practices.” See: Sommer, Doris, “Introduction: Wiggle Room,” in *Cultural Agency in the Americas*, ed. Doris Sommer, 1-28 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 1.

economic and social maturation of the Chinese community offered important background on these components of the immigrants' experience. Robert H. Duncan also writes about Chinese economics in Mexico. Julia Maria Schiavone Camacho's work presents a fascinating analysis of Chinese-Mexican gender relations, while Philip A. Dennis and Jorge Gomez Izquierdo cover race and anti-Chinese sentiment, respectively. Finally, the studies of Leo M. Jacques and Charles C. Cumberland focus on the Chinese experience in Sonora, while Roberto Chao Romero links the Chinese experience in Mexico to the larger phenomenon of Chinese diaspora.<sup>2</sup> While these authors undoubtedly helped in the formulation of the work's theory, many of these writings depict Chinese immigrants solely as victims of state power. This paper, then, adds to the field of history an alternate analysis of Chinese immigrants in Mexico as agents who continually negotiated with Mexican discourse not only through their adaptation strategies that allowed them to prosper in Mexico but also through their various responses (including emigration away from their new country) to Mexican hostility.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Chao Romero, "The Dragon in Big Lusong: Chinese Immigration and Settlement in Mexico: 1882-1940," (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2003), xvi-xvii.

## **Introduction: Trouble in Sonora**

In September of 1925, a report from U.S. Consular Agent Henry C. A. Damm working in Sonora, Mexico relayed the destructive action of rioters in the eastern Sonora town of Nacozari de Pilares. There, a reported mob of 1,000 Mexicans under the leadership of anti-Chinese activists attacked the stores and homes of Chinese residents of this community, even holding some as hostages. Mexican police proved ineffective in ameliorating the situation; one officer was fatally shot and another wounded before federal cavalry troops ended the crisis. However, this military maneuver did not seem to quell the anti-Chinese sentiments in the town. Damm reported that a bridge on a local rail line later burned down, presumably the work of the rioters in trying to prevent more federal military action. He also signaled the continued likelihood of anti-Chinese attacks in Sonora by claiming that, “with the feeling against the Chinese existing in Sonora, similar outbreaks and disturbances may be expected to occur at any time.”<sup>3</sup>

The incident in Nacozari de Pilares is indicative of a wider development of anti-Chinese sentiment throughout Mexico following the onset and culmination of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Chinese immigrants, mostly men, flocked to Mexico in increasing numbers in response to favorable economic and political conditions propagated by Porfirio Diaz’ administration (1876-1910) that called for more workers to fuel economic projects such as railroad building and mining. By adopting a variety of strategies and community building techniques, many of these immigrants successfully renegotiated their prescribed roles as wage laborers, and many even became wealthy. Their strategies included: shunning low paying jobs and Mexican business

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<sup>3</sup> Report from Henry C. A. Damm entitled, “Anti-Chinese Demonstrations in Sonora, Mexico,” (Sept. 5, 1925), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/14, The Ohio State University Libraries.

models for more lucrative, mercantile pursuits, forming mutual aid societies that allowed for increased Chinese community communication, and forming family ties with Mexican women.

Following the development of nationalistic and xenophobic political ideologies in Mexico after the Mexican Revolution, the prosperity that these strategies afforded to Chinese immigrants to Mexico became threatened by anti-Chinese feelings.<sup>4</sup> Mexicans subjected Chinese immigrants to abuses that targeted physical and economic well being as well as their legal rights, and many of these abuses focused on the very strategies that had made the Chinese in Mexico successful in the first place. For instance, economic hostility often took the form of riots or processions in front of successful Chinese business, while labor unions and anti-Chinese groups directed non-violent hostility against Chinese merchants by encouraging boycotts or outright closures of Chinese stores. Similarly, legal sanctions often proposed by elected officials targeted both Chinese economic success and Chinese practices of forming relationships with Mexican women.

As this growing anti-Chinese sentiment increased, Chinese immigrants largely refused to propitiate this violent discourse by abandoning the very practices that made them successful. Instead, the immigrants continued to rely on practices that allowed them to prosper in Mexico, and as their poor treatment became unbearable, they engaged in a final form of negotiation with Mexican society by leaving the country with their wives and families, a behavior that produced negative consequences for Mexican economics and social relations.

This study seeks to examine how Chinese immigrant groups that were so successful in negotiating for a prosperous life in Mexico ultimately renegotiated this success as a result of the

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<sup>4</sup> For the development of nationalism and xenophobic ideologies in Mexico, see: Leo M. Jacques. "Have Quick More Money than Mandarins: The Chinese in Sonora," *The Journal of Arizona History* 17, no. 2 (1976), 202-7.

rise of xenophobic and nationalistic ideologies following the Mexican Revolution. While strategies such as operating small businesses, forming mutual aid societies, and marrying Mexican women had proved effective in helping them to adjust to their new homes, Chinese immigrants largely continued to rely on similar practices in dealing with growing Mexican persecution as the twentieth century unfolded. However, nationalist sentiment in Mexico that arose from revolution would no longer tolerate these strategies, and the Chinese immigrant community consequently found itself embroiled in a conflict of ideologies that would ultimately lead it to undertake a final, drastic form of cultural negotiation by leaving Mexico altogether.

### **The Acceptance of Foreign Influence in Mexico: 1876-1910**

From the initial stages of Porfirio Diaz's regime (1876-1910) until the beginning stages of the Mexican Revolution, nationalist political discourse in Mexico largely encouraged not only foreign immigration to Mexico, but also foreign economic development. Kenneth R. Cott describes a "consensus on development" amongst Mexican political leaders in the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He claims that this consensus revolved around a theory that Mexico had the potential for wealth, and that immigration, a transportation system, a removal of government obstacles, and an establishment of order could help this nation to realize such potential. Cott cites a desired increase in the labor force as another reason why political thought encouraged immigration at this time.<sup>5</sup> Evelyn Hu-Dehart and others echo the idea that prevalent thought in Mexico following Diaz' rise to prominence in 1876 shifted to ideas of capitalism, and both Robert H. Duncan and Gómez Izquierdo claim that Diaz' scheme for modernizing Mexico

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Cott, "Mexican Diplomacy and the Chinese Issue, 1876-1910," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 67, no.1 (Feb., 1987): 63-4.



through market expansion and colonization of remote areas initially focused on attracting white, Catholic European settlers.<sup>6</sup>

However, when the prospect of immigration to Mexico, especially to “barren” frontier regions in need of colonization and settlement, failed to lure European colonists, Mexican authorities accepted Chinese immigrants as the best available alternative.<sup>7</sup> Mexican diplomat to the United States and finance minister Matías Romero was among the first prominent figures to endorse the prospect of Chinese immigration, and this leader’s comments, as well as the ideas of other government officials, illustrate that this policy was designed to infuse Mexico with a new supply of labor.<sup>8</sup> The 1899 Treaty of Amity and Commerce between China and Mexico, a treaty that made immigration of Chinese citizens to Mexico “free and voluntary,” perfectly manifested this political acceptance of an influx of Chinese citizens.<sup>9</sup> Partially as a result of this treaty, Chinese immigrants in Mexico, already present in the decades leading up to 1900, increased from 2,718 in 1900 to around 13,202 in 1910.<sup>10</sup> In spite of the country’s turbulent political conditions, the immigration of Chinese to the Mexican state of Sonora remained surprisingly “heavy” during the period of revolutionary conflict following the capitulation of Díaz in 1910,

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<sup>6</sup> Evelyn Hu-Dehart, “Voluntary Associations in a Predominantly Male Immigrant Community: The Chinese on the Northern Mexican Frontier, 1880-1930,” in *Voluntary Associations in the Chinese Diaspora*, ed. Khun Eng Kuah-Pearce and Evelyn Hu-Dehart, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006): 141; Robert. H. Duncan. “The Chinese and the Economic Development of Northern Baja California, 1889-1929,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (Nov., 1994), 616; José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino en México (1871-1934)* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1991): 43.

<sup>7</sup> Robert. H. Duncan. “The Chinese and the Economic Development of Northern Baja California, 1889-1929,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (Nov., 1994), 616-7.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Cott, “Mexican Diplomacy and the Chinese Issue, 1876-1910,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 67, no.1 (Feb., 1987), 64-7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 63, 69-70; Evelyn Hu-Dehart, “On Coolies and Shopkeepers: The Chinese as *Huagong* (Laborers) and *Huashang* (Merchants) in Latin America/Caribbean,” in *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas*, ed. Wanni W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee, (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 90 (see table 5.2).

and the total Chinese population in all of Mexico in 1926 was 24,218.<sup>11</sup> Most of these immigrants settled in the states of Baja California, Sonora, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Chiapas, Veracruz, and Yucatan.<sup>12</sup> As these facts demonstrate, Porfirian economic policy had succeeded in encouraging foreign immigration to Mexico, and many of these immigrants were from China.

Mexican political and economic conditions were not the only factors that encouraged Chinese citizens to move to Mexico. In his dissertation on Chinese immigration entitled, “The Dragon in Big Lusong: Chinese Immigration and Settlement in Mexico, 1882-1940,” Robert Chao Romero provides a detailed look at Chinese political, social, and economic forces that also led Chinese citizens to leave their native land. Most Chinese citizens came from the southern Chinese province of Guangdong. As they had in all of China, population numbers in this province from 1787 to 1850 grew rapidly, increasing from 16 million to 28 million (during the same period, overall Chinese population grew from 143 million to 432 million). Romero is quick to point out why this could be a problem for Chinese citizens:

Despite such marked demographic growth, this boom of new births was not accompanied by any increase in agricultural productivity or natural resources, and the Ch’ing government initiated no new agrarian or land reform policies designed to counter the negative impact of Chinese population pressures.

This author later names “land shortages,” “reduced standards of living,” “increased indebtedness,” and “peasant socio-economic displacement,” as the manifestations of these

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<sup>11</sup> Evelyn Hu-Dehart, “On Coolies and Shopkeepers: The Chinese as *Huagong* (Laborers) and *Huashang* (Merchants) in Latin America/Caribbean,” in *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas*, ed. Wanni W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee, (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 90; *For population statistics, see:* Robert Chao Romero, “The Dragon in Big Lusong: Chinese Immigration and Settlement in Mexico: 1882-1940,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2003), 265-6.

<sup>12</sup> Charles C. Cumberland, “The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (May, 1960), 191.

“population pressures.”<sup>13</sup> Population increases and land problems were not the only factors that led Chinese citizens to leave their homelands. Shifts to commercial agriculture forced traditional, subsistence farmers to sell their lands and seek wage labor. Other Chinese citizens lost their traditional jobs as more trading ports opened following the British victory in the Opium War of 1839-1842. Chinese textiles struggled to compete with cheap, imported European varieties, and new commercial ports (opened as part of the war’s treaty) drove workers in other ports out of business.<sup>14</sup> Even political conditions in China made immigration from this nation a viable alternative. The 1851 Taiping Rebellion, largely focused in southern China, killed 20 million Chinese citizens by 1864, and the Red Turban revolt similarly claimed around 1 million Chinese citizens of Guangdong. In addition to the already disturbing consequences of these rebellions, fighting prevented the application of both government and local resources towards land maintenance and disaster relief, resulting in food shortages.<sup>15</sup> Circumstances in China, particularly in the Guangdong province, clearly encouraged Chinese citizens to leave this country, and many would seek refuge in Mexico.

United States Consular Agent Harry L. Walsh in Manzanillo, Colima compiled a list of names of Chinese immigrants arriving to this port in 1921. This list presents valuable opportunities to understand typical age and gender characteristics of these immigrants.

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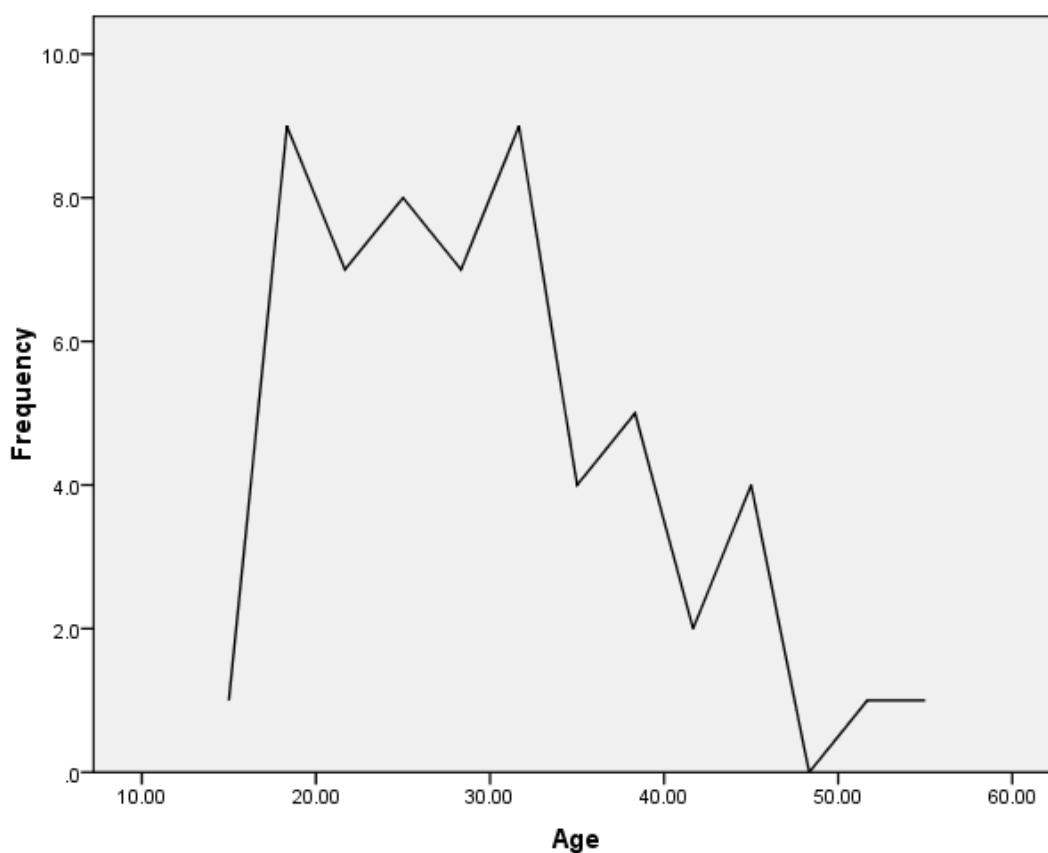
<sup>13</sup> Robert Chao Romero, “The Dragon in Big Lusong: Chinese Immigration and Settlement in Mexico: 1882-1940,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2003), 32-3.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 35-6.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 36-8.

GRAPH 1

**Ages of Chinese Immigrants Arriving to Manzanillo, Mexico,  
January 1921-April 1921**



*Source:* Consul Harry L. Walsh to the Sec. of State, (Jan. 8, 1921; Feb. 17, 1921; Feb. 28, 1921; Mar. 23, 1921; April 19, 1921), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593 /37-41, The Ohio State University Libraries.

As Graph 1 demonstrates, most Chinese immigrants recorded in Walsh's list were under the age of 34, and the average age of the Chinese immigrants arriving to this port was 29.8 years old. The overwhelming number of male immigrants in this Walsh's report further validates a statement by Bartley F. Yost in Guaymas, Sonora, who commented that, "... only in rare cases

do the Chinese bring their wives and families to Mexico.”<sup>16</sup> How did these large numbers of mostly male immigrants negotiate for prosperous roles in an unfamiliar land? An exploration of Chinese survival strategies and community-building techniques should help to clarify this question.

### **The Establishment of Chinese Prosperity and Community**

Chinese immigrants employed a number of strategies in negotiating for prosperity and happiness in Mexico. These strategies included: altering Mexican business models through small business operation and the exclusive hiring of Chinese immigrants, forming political organizations and mutual aid societies, and starting relationships with Mexican women. An important component for the success of each of these strategies was Mexican political acceptance. Federal Mexican powers would continue to support this community at least midway into the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While this protection eroded near the end of the 1920's, additional primary source documentation reveals that during the time leading up to this period, Chinese residents in Mexico at the very least enjoyed the nominal support of the Mexican federal government.<sup>17</sup> Federal military forces perfectly exemplify this trend when they thwarted the efforts of the mayor of Cananea, Sonora, to expel Chinese merchants from this city in 1920.<sup>18</sup> The Mexican government similarly resorted to military power in order to put down

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<sup>16</sup> Report from Consul Bartley F. Yost entitled, “Mexican Women Prohibited from Marrying Chinese Men,” (Jan. 13, 1924), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016 /4, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>17</sup> For more on Chinese loss of government protection, see José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino en México (1871-1934)* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1991), 130-3.

<sup>18</sup> Jonustay to MacMurray, (Jan. 12, 1920). National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/21. The Ohio State University Libraries.

the previously referenced anti-Chinese riots in northern Sonora in September of 1925.<sup>19</sup> In July of that same year, Mexican President Plutarco Elías Calles spoke with the Anti-Chinese League of Torreon, Coahuila. While giving his moral sanction to this group's activities, the Mexican president simultaneously demonstrated his respect for Mexico's 1899 treaty with China by warning this group not to violate any laws or international agreements.<sup>20</sup> Although these examples of federal support of Chinese presence and economic viability in Mexico would not continue indefinitely into the future, they prove that the political protection of this group--initially fomented during the Porfiriato--continued at least midway into the 1920's. Such protection would temporarily allow Chinese citizens to employ their economic, social, and sexual strategies in trying to find a place in Mexican society.

Chinese immigrants in Mexico negotiated for a comfortable and prosperous place in Mexican society by eschewing prevalent economic discourse. Recall that Mexican political leaders, such as Matías Romero, hoped to subjugate Chinese immigrants into a subordinate, labor-intensive role.<sup>21</sup> Contrary to these leaders' vision for Chinese immigrants, most Chinese in Mexico refused to accept manual labor positions, and a lack of adequate wages constitutes one important reason for this refusal.<sup>22</sup> Instead, many Chinese became small merchants. Hu-Dehart describes the ascendancy of Sonoran Chinese into roles as "petite bourgeoisie." While some

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<sup>19</sup> Report from Consul Henry C. Damm entitled, "Anti-Chinese Demonstrations in Sonora, Mexico," (September 5, 1925), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/14, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>20</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (July 8, 1925), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/12, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Cott, "Mexican Diplomacy and the Chinese Issue, 1876-1910," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 67, no.1 (Feb., 1987): 66-7.

<sup>22</sup> Evelyn Hu-Dehart, "On Coolies and Shopkeepers: The Chinese as *Huagong* (Laborers) and *Huashang* (Merchants) in Latin America/Caribbean," in *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas*, ed. Wanni W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee, 78-111 (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 92-93; Leo M. Jacques. "Have Quick More Money than Mandarins: The Chinese in Sonora," *The Journal of Arizona History* 17, no. 2 (1976), 211-12.

Sonoran Chinese began to manufacture shoes and clothing, others had begun to establish grocery stores, restaurants, canteens, and truck farms by 1890.<sup>23</sup>

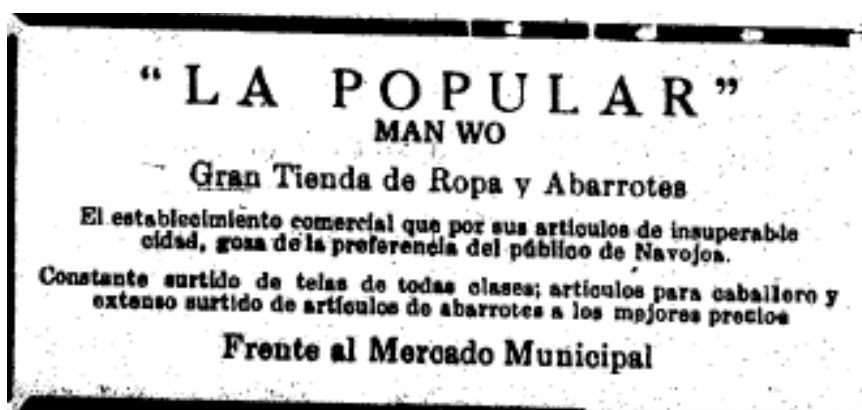


Figure 1: Newspaper Advertisement for Chinese-owned clothing and grocery store in Navojoa, Sonora, heading reads, "The Popular...Great Clothing and Grocery Store"

Source: Report from American Consul General William Dawson entitled "Press in Mexico (Section III)" Feb. 15, 1929, 812.91/33, enclosure, The National Archives Records Group 59, The Ohio State Libraries

These Chinese firms would often operate near mining camps controlled by U.S. interests in order to supply the large number of workers that serviced such operations. This focus on supplying American interests partially helped Chinese owners to sustain economic viability during the Mexican Revolution, as American mines continued to operate (and to need supplies) in spite of the political turmoil that engulfed the country.<sup>24</sup> These Chinese businesses tended to be smaller and more ubiquitous than their Mexican counterparts in Sonora, demonstrated by the fact that 417 Chinese businesses were located in over 65 of the state's towns in 1925. In comparison, sixty-one Mexican-owned businesses were located in significantly fewer municipalities. While

<sup>23</sup> Evelyn Hu-Dehart, "On Coolies and Shopkeepers: The Chinese as *Huagong* (Laborers) and *Huashang* (Merchants) in Latin America/Caribbean," in *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas*, ed. Wanni W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee, 78-111 (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 94.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-5.

these Mexican businesses generally were capitalized at between 5,000 and 99,000 pesos, 91% of the Chinese businesses were capitalized under 4,900 pesos.<sup>25</sup>

Primary source documentation bolsters these claims regarding the economic dominance of small Chinese merchants in this state. For instance, Consul Bartley F. Yost in Guaymas commented to the Secretary of State in 1919 that, “At least 75% of the retail grocery trade in this part of the State is in the hands of the Chinese.”<sup>26</sup> Consul Francis J. Dyer similarly wrote in December of that same year:

“In Hermosillo, one of the leading merchants tells me, ([in] a city of perhaps 15,000 people), there are 90 small Chinese stores. In Nogales, the Chinese have nearly all the business, especially dealing in groceries, piece goods, notions, household articles of various kinds, tobacco, and so forth. Some have little tailor shops, garment factories, restaurants, and there is a Chinese laundry.”<sup>27</sup>

The American Embassy in Mexico further emphasized the situation in Sonora in a 1924 Foreign Service Report. This report states, “...in several states, especially Sonora and Sinaloa, the Chinese are fast obtaining a practical monopoly of small businesses...”<sup>28</sup>

While this evidence presents a thorough account of the development of economic adaptation on the part of the Chinese in Sonora, additional writings reveal that similar circumstances occurred throughout many Mexican municipalities outside of Sonora. For instance, in a letter to the Secretary of State in 1924, Consul James B. Stewart in Tampico, Tamaulipas claimed that, “Probably 50% of the bread consumed in Tampico is made at small

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<sup>25</sup> For the peso figures, as well as for the numbers of businesses and municipalities, see: *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>26</sup> Bartley F. Yost to the Sec. of State, (July 26, 1919), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.504/192, The Ohio State University.

<sup>27</sup> Francis J. Dyer to the Sec. of State, (Dec. 28, 1919), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/17, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>28</sup> American Foreign Service Report from the American Embassy in Mexico City (Sept. 17, 1924) National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/47, The Ohio State University Libraries.



Chinese bakeries.”<sup>29</sup> Commenting on the situation in Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Consul William E. Chapman writes, “there are many Chinese in Mazatlan and in other towns in this Consular District, but nearly all of these are engaged in mercantile pursuits of one nature or another...”<sup>30</sup> In a comprehensive report detailing the nature and consequences of Chinese immigration to Mexico, Reed Paige Clark similarly describes the tendency of Chinese throughout Mexico to compete with poorer Mexicans in small farming, trade, restaurants, and laundries.<sup>31</sup> So not only did Chinese businesses spread throughout the state of Sonora, rather, a similar trend was taking place throughout many Mexican districts.

In order to further cultivate economic success, many Chinese businesses even developed hiring models that were distinct from those traditionally used in Mexico. Duncan describes a trend amongst members of the Chinese community of Baja California to hire mostly single, Chinese males. This practice allowed both owner and employee to live at the establishment and to save on overhead costs.<sup>32</sup> Widespread Mexican reactions to such hiring models would indicate that this trend held forth in other states as well.<sup>33</sup> While Duncan’s idea about overhead cost reduction seems reasonable, it is equally reasonable to surmise that sharing quarters with other Chinese immigrants also provided a sense of companionship and comfort in an unfamiliar land. Economic adaptation of this sort was undoubtedly a key factor in allowing Chinese immigrants to Mexico to thrive in their new surroundings.

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<sup>29</sup> James B. Stewart to the Sec. of State, (Sept. 25, 1924), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.504/579, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>30</sup> William E. Chapman to Sec. of State, (Nov. 9, 1920), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/35. The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>31</sup> Report from Reed Paige Clark entitled “Immigration of Chinese into Mexico,” (June 5, 1928). National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/61. The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>32</sup> Robert. H. Duncan. “The Chinese and the Economic Development of Northern Baja California, 1889-1929,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (Nov., 1994), 640.

<sup>33</sup> For more evidence regarding the hiring practices of Chinese immigrants, see page 22.

While many Chinese immigrants participated in small businesses, the intensity of this participation was not uniform in every state. U.S. Consular Agent Thomas McEnelly in Chihuahua reported in 1924 that, “The great majority of Chinese residing in this district are agriculturalists.”<sup>34</sup> The size of McEnelly’s consular district is unclear, but a U.S. Consular Office most likely would not have been in a rural area. The comment therefore remains important in revealing the varying extent of Chinese participation in small businesses throughout different Mexican states. Chinese immigrants in Northern Baja California also, “[assumed] diverse economic roles, ranging from rural laborer to urban capitalist,” and period sources in Duncan’s work claim that Chinese farmers raised 80% of the cotton crop in the Mexicali Valley.<sup>35</sup> So while ubiquitous Chinese businesses prospered and dominated in many areas of Mexico, it is important to realize that this trend did not preclude Chinese immigrants from actively participating in other economic sectors.

Forming voluntary organizations and mutual aid societies proved to be another key strategy in the establishment and survival of these Chinese communities. The first of these organizations, the Unión Fraternal, sought to promote, “‘unity, mutual aid, and moral, material and intellectual improvement of all Chinese citizens’” living in Mexico.<sup>36</sup> Although the group attempted to complete this goal mainly by responding to Mexican hostility against Chinese immigrants, it also undertook efforts to care for its members.<sup>37</sup> In describing this point, Hu-

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<sup>34</sup> McEnelly to Sec. of State, (April 22, 1924) National Archives Record Group 59, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>35</sup> Robert. H. Duncan. “The Chinese and the Economic Development of Northern Baja California, 1889-1929,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (Nov., 1994), 616, 637.

<sup>36</sup> Evelyn Hu-Dehart, “Voluntary Associations in a Predominantly Male Immigrant Community: The Chinese on the Northern Mexican Frontier, 1880-1930,” in *Voluntary Associations in the Chinese Diaspora*, ed. Khun Eng Kuah-Pearce and Evelyn Hu-Dehart, 141-168 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 147-8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

Dehart writes, “If any member became ill or had extraordinary needs, UF members collected donations from all the chapters [of the organization].”<sup>38</sup> Similar societies included the Chee Kung Tong, The Asociación Mutualista China de la República Mexicana, and the Partido Nacionalista China de la República, which appeared to work mostly for Chinese mainland political reforms.<sup>39</sup> By forming these organizations and by communicating with each other, these immigrants also found, “‘stability and continuity’” while they simultaneously encountered, “‘rapid social change far from home.’”<sup>40</sup>

In addition to providing this “stability and community,” some societies, such as the Partido Nacionalista China de la República, also helped immigrants to share a common connection to their homeland by allowing them to continue to participate in Chinese politics. In 1927, for instance, “El Partido Nacionalista Chino de Veracruz” issued a handbill in the streets of that city advocating Chinese nationalist movements against European and U.S. military domination in China:

We want Europe and the United States to understand that simultaneously with the appearance of every foreign warship in our Chinese ports, one-hundred thousand young people launch themselves to flame the colors of the nationalist armies.<sup>41</sup>

Certainly not solitary or singular in nature, this statement shows just how crucial nationalist activities and political groups could be in allowing Chinese immigrants in Mexico to find common identity and purpose through a connection to homeland politics.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 150-1, 153, 156.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 153-6.

<sup>41</sup> John Q. Wood to American Consul General, (March 5, 1927), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.00B/168, The Ohio State University Libraries, translation from Spanish.

### **The Growth of Nationalism and Xenophobia: 1910-1940**

As revolutionary events shifted dominant thought in Mexico increasingly towards nationalistic and xenophobic tendencies, Chinese immigrant groups found themselves in increasingly isolated, oppressed positions. In El movimiento antichino en México, (1871-1934) José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo takes a theoretical look at the development of nationalism and xenophobia in Mexico. This author claims that nationalism has traditionally functioned in Mexico as a provider of social cohesion made possible through a common loyalty to the Mexican nation. He further argues that xenophobia developed as a component to such nationalism in the socially destructive revolution of 1910 because of the growing influence of foreign businesses during the Porfiriato. He even suggests that leaders of revolutionary factions employed concepts of both xenophobia and nationalism in order to unite Mexicans under their banners and to widen their bases of support. Finally, this author and Charles Cumberland agree that while Mexicans directed these virulent, revolutionary ideologies towards citizens of United States, European nations, *and* China, the Chinese immigrants received most of the palpable consequences of this situation because of the Chinese government's inability to support them.<sup>42</sup>

As nationalism and xenophobia began to envelop Mexico, tension provided by the armed conflict of the revolution allowed these sentiments to develop into violence against Chinese immigrants. However, hostility against this group could also feature a potent mix economic actions against Chinese businesses and legal actions against Chinese judicial privileges. This discussion will now examine the nature and consequences of such hostility.

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<sup>42</sup> José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino en México (1871-1934)* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1991), 83-6; Charles C. Cumberland, "The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (May, 1960), 210.

One of the clearest manifestations of Mexican aversion to Chinese immigrants focuses on physical violence perpetrated against this group. In May of 1911, Consul G. C. Carothers described a massacre of Chinese citizens in Torreon, Coahuila, by Maderists troops:

At about 6 am, the first Maderists appeared in the city where they were astonished to find that the Federals had evacuated. They first went to the jail and liberated all the prisoners. A tremendous mob was very soon formed and the sacking of the Chinese stores commenced. Very shortly the murdering of Chinamen was begun. It is estimated that two hundred twenty-four Chinamen were massacred.<sup>43</sup>

Following correspondence submitted by a different Consular Agent in Torreon three weeks later, Cumberland cites 303 as the number of Chinese killed in this attack. Although this author's writings make it clear that the large scale of the attack in Torreon was never repeated, the threat of violence against Chinese citizens did not end with this outbreak.<sup>44</sup> William E. Algers commented about such threats in 1912:

There are now in Mazatlan some 100 or more Americans and 300 Chinese, if the Federal troops leave, the latter will be in great danger, as an uprising against them would be liable to take place at any moment.<sup>45</sup>

Two additional Chinese residents of Sonora were murdered in 1913, and 1915 mob violence in Nacozari, Sonora resulted in Mexicans stripping Chinese residents of their clothing in the streets.<sup>46</sup> After the fall of Chihuahua City in 1919 to the forces of Pancho Villa, daily newspapers reported that while most foreigners in the city remained unharmed after the withdraw of Villa's troops, "...Villa caused the execution of a large number of the Chinese

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<sup>43</sup> Carothers to Sec. of State, (May 22, 1911), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.00/1968, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>44</sup> Charles C. Cumberland, "The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (May, 1960), 192.

<sup>45</sup> Algers to Sec. of State, (April 14, 1912), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.00/3754, The Ohio State University Libraries

<sup>46</sup> Charles C. Cumberland, "The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (May, 1960), 192-4.

inhabitants of Chihuahua City.”<sup>47</sup> While these instances of physical violence against Chinese immigrants certainly were not as common as situations that endangered Chinese economic and legal rights, it would not be illogical to presume that the drastic nature of these examples inspired an amount of consternation amongst the Chinese community equal to that inspired by such economic or legal hostility. Violence against Chinese immigrants was a prominent feature of newly formulated nationalistic sentiment.

As armed conflict spread through much of northern Mexico following the onset of the revolution in 1910-11, violence propagated by military factions against Chinese businesses also became more common.<sup>48</sup> Such cases of disruptive actions against Chinese businesses in Mexico often accompanied those of physical abuse. These attacks targeted the successful strategies of these immigrants in operating small businesses. Concordant with this idea, in March of 1913 Consular Agent Simpich relayed a message to the Sec. of State from another agent in Cananea. The message claims that Maderists stationed in a suburb of Cananea not only looted the town’s Chinese businesses, but also “[seized] about one hundred horses on streets, property of Americans and Mexicans.”<sup>49</sup> Looting on the part of revolutionary armies undoubtedly formed an important threat to Chinese economic interests.

However, other examples of seemingly more chaotic, mob-perpetrated violence against Chinese firms remain equally prominent. These instances sometimes coincided closely with those of physical abuse. Looting of Chinese stores in Sonora in 1915 took place in

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<sup>47</sup> Sec. of War to Sec of State, (Dec. 16, 1916), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.00/20087, enclosure, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>48</sup> Evelyn Hu-Dehart, “On Coolies and Shopkeepers: The Chinese as *Huagong* (Laborers) and *Huashang* (Merchants) in Latin America/Caribbean,” in *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas*, ed. Wanni W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee, 78-111 (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 95.

<sup>49</sup> Simpich to Sec. of State, (March 13, 1913), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.00/6668 The Ohio State University Libraries.

municipalities such as Torres, Guaymas, Hermosillo, and Corcorit. During one such episode, twenty-three Chinese citizens in Guaymas died.<sup>50</sup> William D. Maxwell provides a first-hand look at the logistics of such a demonstration in his 1925 letter to the Secretary of State.

According to Maxwell, groups of Mexicans in Hermosillo organized under the title “The Committee” encouraged the city’s lower classes to demonstrate against Chinese immigrants, and these leaders joined their followers in displaying both parades and signs reading, “Death to the Chino” and, “Out with the Chino.” Maxwell proceeded to describe an occasion in which such a parade developed into the threat of violence as participants lit fires in front of Chinese stores. While this specific incident did not directly result in violence against Chinese citizens, it is easy to imagine how such demonstrations could lead to bloodshed.<sup>51</sup>

One occasion that did lead to violent action against Chinese businesses occurred in Torreon in 1926. Under the leadership of Ernesto Contreras, Hipólito Méndez, Crescencio Espinosa, and Juan Pérez, a group known as the Anti-Chinese League of Torreon staged a demonstration in that city’s public market. Before police could intervene, members of this group had assaulted 10 Chinese properties. One of these businesses, La Tosca, lost only 15 pesos. However, many others, such as La República, El Eden, and that of Delfino S. Lam lost over 100 pesos each. La Gran Lucha, owned by Jesus Chuy, went out of business as a result of the attacks, and two Chinese owners, Juan C. Wah and Augustin Sing, dealt with threats to both their family and home, respectively.<sup>52</sup> Disorderly behavior of this sort, especially when accompanied

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<sup>50</sup> For accounts of these episodes of looting and violence in Sonora, see: Charles C. Cumberland, “The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (May, 1960), 195.

<sup>51</sup> William D. Maxwell to Sec. of State, (July, 28 1925), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/13, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>52</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (Jan. 8, 1926), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/16, The Ohio State University Libraries.

by the threat and execution of physical violence, serves as another excellent indicator of how drastically dominant opinion regarding Chinese immigrants had changed since the Porfiriato.

Disruptive behaviors against Chinese firms could also take non-violent forms. United States Vice Consul Chas. W. Doherty provides a vivid description of such actions as he describes the closings of foreign owned operations by one Mexican labor union, the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM). While this consular agent provides a detailed account of the CROM's closing of a U.S. owned bar in response to the bar's refusal to hire 80% Mexicans, Doherty's letter also describes similar establishment closings that took place in local Chinese bars and restaurants.<sup>53</sup>

Other examples of non-violent actions against Chinese firms come from both Tamaulipas and Chihuahua. In 1924, the "Unión de Comerciantes de Abarrotes por Menor" in Tampico, Tamaulipas petitioned the governor of this state to create a "Chinese Quarter" where all Chinese businesses would be segregated. This initiative would allow the, "interests of the small Mexican merchant [to] be adequately protected."<sup>54</sup> In the same year, Chinese residents of Chihuahua reported the drafting of a petition that also called for the segregation of the Chinese residents of that state.<sup>55</sup> Two years later, at an "anti-Chinese" meeting held in Tampico and attended by 150-200 people, anti-Chinese organizers "rigorously exhorted" Mexican citizens to "combat" Chinese economic competition.<sup>56</sup> As each of these examples suggests, antagonism against

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<sup>53</sup> Chas. W. Doherty to Sec. of State, (September 12, 1929), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.504/1051, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>54</sup> James B. Stewart to Sec. of State, (March 31, 1924), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/6, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas McEnelly to Sec. of State, (April 22, 1924), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/7, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>56</sup> Charles A. Bay to Sec. of State, (Feb. 8, 1926), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/17, The Ohio State University Libraries.



Chinese businesses represented a major threat to these immigrants' ability to employ lucrative business operations in negotiating for their own survival and prosperity in post-revolutionary Mexico.

Mexican implementation of legal action against Chinese immigrants serves as the third and most salient signal of a major change in the basic frameworks of Mexican beliefs. These actions targeted both Chinese business and sexual strategies. The state of Sonora provides abundant examples of legislative action against Chinese immigrants, and comments from local and state leaders demonstrate the official, sanctioned nature of anti-Chinese antipathy in this state. In December of 1919, Sonoran Governor Adolfo de la Huerta sent a telegram to the Sonoran house of deputies that cited "intense antagonism" between Mexicans in Sonora and Sinaloa and Chinese residents. The governor explained that these problems were consequences of Chinese monopolies in business and the tendency of Chinese residents to spread diseases. These discriminatory attitudes became a tangible part of government policy as de la Huerta proceeded to recommend that the Chinese merchants in Cananea be expelled as of January 1, 1920.<sup>57</sup> Three days after newspapers published de la Huerta's telegram, Carlos L. Alvarez, the municipal president of Guaymas, issued a similar handbill addressed "To the People of Guaymas." The handbill contained this scathing statement from the town council of Guaymas regarding the "Chinese problem" in Sonora:

Considering that the expulsion of all elements of Chinese is one of the first necessary principals for the progress of the State, since besides absorbing the commerce and riches of the State they have come to be a most serious menace to the healthy conservation of our race; considering moreover that the aggressive

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<sup>57</sup> George T. Summerlin to Sec. of State, (Dec. 31, 1919), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/21, The Ohio State University Libraries.

egoism, with which term it may be characterized, they have reached a state where they ignore our laws by extension of their absorbing tentacles in all directions, invading not only the labor belonging to the strong sex, but also that which is of the woman, having the advantage of offering their labor, be it manual or otherwise, for derisive wages...<sup>58</sup>

These comments serve to introduce the council's later plea to higher government authorities to check the flow of Chinese immigration. Such statements, stemming from leaders in both legislative and executive positions, illustrate the remarkable degree of acceptance achieved by the idea of legal action against these immigrants.

The previous statements put forth by local Sonoran officials depict anti-Chinese disdain that remained salient amongst government representatives. Laws promulgated by legislature and other powerful officials reinforce the idea that this state's government supported legal action against the Chinese. In 1919, the Sonoran legislature passed a law known as the Labor and Social Prevision Law, which mandated that Mexicans must comprise at least 80% of the workforce of foreign-owned businesses. While some cities, such as Magdalena and Hermosillo, threatened Chinese establishments with severe punishments if they did not comply with the new law, others, such as Guaymas, delayed in enforcing the decree, instead relying on stringent tax measures against Chinese merchants in order to persecute these immigrants. Around the same time, leadership in Hermosillo also appointed a group of doctors to report on the health of Chinese merchants and the sanitary quality of their buildings. Bartley F. Yost commented to the Sec. of State that Mexicans intended this measure as a means of putting Chinese people who

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<sup>58</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (Dec. 25, 1919), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/19, The Ohio State University Libraries.

carried dangerous, infectious diseases out of business.<sup>59</sup> The Sonoran legislature continued this trend of anti-Chinese legislative action in December of 1923 by passing a bill calling for the creation of designated areas of each city into which Chinese citizens could be segregated.<sup>60</sup> A specific component of the law that prohibited Chinese citizens from establishing “any business whatsoever outside of the zone assigned to them” reveals the economic thinking behind such a move.<sup>61</sup> These examples not only demonstrate the prevalence of legislative action against Chinese citizens, but they also show how many of these laws centered on successful Chinese economic practices.

Each of these examples of discrimination against Chinese immigrants hints at a racial component to popular expression of nationalism and xenophobia. What role did race play in anti-Chinese sentiment? Philip A. Dennis attempts to answer this important question in “The Anti-Chinese Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico.” He argues that discrimination against Chinese in Sonora evolved from initially targeting Chinese economic success to eventually including racist claims that disparaged the “culturally distinct” Chinese way of life.<sup>62</sup> As some of the above-mentioned examples attest, these attacks in Sonora depicted Chinese immigrants as “sickly” gamblers and opium dealers. Similar sentiment also claimed that the Chinese were people who ate little in order to save money, and one propagandist even claimed that Chinese men converted

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<sup>59</sup> *For Social Labor and Prevision Law, as well as the appointment of these physicians, see:* Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (July 26, 1919), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.504/192, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>60</sup> Report from Consul Henry C. A. Damm entitled “Anti-Chinese Legislation By The State of Sonora, Mexico” (February 6, 1924) National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/5, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>61</sup> Report from Bartley F. Yost entitled, “Segregation of Chinese in Sonora,” (Jan. 5, 1924) The National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/3, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>62</sup> Philip A. Dennis, “Anti-Chinese Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico,” *Ethnohistory* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1979), 72, 78-9.

Mexican widows into prostitutes.<sup>63</sup> In “Traversing Boundaries: Chinese, Mexicans, and Chinese Mexicans in the Formation of Gender, Race, and Nation in the Twentieth Century U.S.-Mexican Borderlands,” Julia Maria Schiavone Comacho helps to extend this analysis of race outside of Sonora by explaining Mexican stereotypes of Chinese as unhealthy. This author claims that Mexican fears of infirm Chinese immigrants stemmed from reports of frequent cholera outbreaks in China during this period.<sup>64</sup> The existence of groups focused on achieving racial purity such as the “Committee on Racial Welfare” in Chihuahua and the “Liga Pro Raza” in Coahuila further point to the widespread nature of discrimination specifically focused on race. Following this evidence, it is safe to conclude that racist sentiment accompanied xenophobic and nationalistic expressions of anti-Chinese sentiment and thereby played a significant role in shaping the Chinese experience in Mexico.

As the Mexican Revolution inspired ideologies of nationalism and xenophobia, popular discourse regarding Chinese immigration changed. Once welcomed into their new homes, these immigrants now faced hostility that threatened their physical, economic, and legal rights, and this threat would elicit a particular response from the Chinese community. This response will be explained below.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 73,76; Charles C. Cumberland, “The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (May, 1960),208-9.

<sup>64</sup> Julia Maria Schiavone Camacho, “Traversing Boundaries: Chinese, Mexicans, and Chinese Mexicans in the Formation of Gender, Race, and Nation in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas El Paso, 2006), 177-9.

### **Initial Chinese Reactions: A Refusal To Renegotiate**

Chinese immigrants responded to Mexican antagonism in a number of ways. They unsuccessfully appealed to empowered Mexicans, and they also continued to practice the same economic, social, and sexual strategies that had allowed them to negotiate for a prosperous place in Mexican society. Continuing their consolidation of close ties with U.S. economic interests in northern Mexico, Chinese citizens also appealed to U.S. government agents for support.

Chinese immigrants tried to appeal to empowered Mexicans to improve the violent, discriminatory situations they faced. However, primary sources prove that these pleas were usually unsuccessful. For instance, in 1919, the Chinese Chargé d’Affaires sent a note to the Mexican Foreign Office protesting against Sonora’s Labor and Social Prevision Law, which required companies to employ 80% Mexican workers. In the note, this diplomat claimed that the law ignored article 127 of the Mexican Constitution by failing to create boards of conciliation and arbitration through which the law should have functioned. The Chinese official also argued that the law was impractical because of the lack of qualified Mexicans to fill positions vacated by foreigners, and also because of a contradictory amendment within the law itself that limited the firing of foreigners.<sup>65</sup> However convincing this official’s arguments may have sounded, they fell on deaf ears; the law not only survived, but Mexican officials eventually began to actively enforce it.<sup>66</sup> Similar Chinese appeals against taxes on commercial establishments in Guaymas in 1920 and against a 1924 law prohibiting intermarriage between Mexican women and Chinese

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<sup>65</sup> George T. Summerlin to Sec. of State, (August 11, 1919), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.504/195, enclosure, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>66</sup> Charles C. Cumberland, “The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (May, 1960), 201-203.

men also received little attention, the former, “being rejected by unanimous vote of the [Guaymas] council...”<sup>67</sup>

As direct dialogue with Mexicans failed, Chinese populations in Mexico rarely attempted to change the prosperous strategies that had played an important role in making them targets for discrimination. Instead, these immigrants usually responded to oppression by continuing the behaviors and survival strategies that had allowed them to initially adapt to the Mexican socioeconomic landscape. For example, Chinese communities continued familiar business tactics by simply refusing to comply with Mexican demands to stop exclusively hiring other Chinese. In 1924, Baja California Governor Abelardo Rodríguez mandated that all businesses in his state employ at least 50% Mexicans.<sup>68</sup> This move echoed the similar 1919 Labor and Social Prevision Law of Sonora, which called for businesses to employ 80% Mexicans. However, the Chinese residents of these states evaded enforcement of the decrees in similar ways: they claimed that each of their employees owned a share in the business, and so the businesses were therefore devoid of *any* employees.<sup>69</sup> Both of these ideas seem consistent with the reporting of Chicago Tribune writer John Cornyn. In an article from March 13, 1928, Cornyn reports that, “a member of the Mexican Congress” complained about this unique form of community formation:

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<sup>67</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (Jan. 18, 1920), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.504/202, The Ohio State University Libraries; Report from Consul Henry C.A. Damm entitled, “Anti-Chinese Legislation By The State of Sonora, Mexico, (Feb. 6, 1924) National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/5, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>68</sup> Robert. H. Duncan. “The Chinese and the Economic Development of Northern Baja California, 1889-1929,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (Nov., 1994), 634.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 634; Charles C. Cumberland, “The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (May, 1960), 197.

Chinese have formed large 'joint stock companies,' in which every Chinese laborer is a stockholder, thus avoiding the law, which requires all companies to employ seventy per cent Mexican labor.<sup>70</sup>

Benjamin Ungson, representing both the Chinese in Sonora as well as the Chinese Unión Fraternal, further elucidated the logic behind Chinese resistance to Sonora's 1919 Labor and Social Prevision Law in a July 28 letter to Bartley F. Yost. Ungson first protests the law using judicial reasoning, and he points out the law's incongruence with multiple articles in the Mexican Constitution. He further states that the law is morally wrong because it discriminates based on nationality, claiming, "Civilized nations by means of titanic struggles ridded themselves of such discrimination long ago." Finally, this Chinese leader argues against the law from a practical standpoint:

Immediately we have the case of the employer who already has foreigners in his establishment. It is practically impossible for him to discharge his employees, for they are his co-workers for the success of his business and they are possessed of the professional secrets upon which demand his trade, his commerce, his products, etc. etc. The employer who should do so would have to train anew the employees that would come to him by the law's decree, and he would have to begin again the drudgery that he had commenced long before, for nobody thinks that the employee who was an errand boy only yesterday is today an amanuensis or a clerk, and in a short time may be the foreman of the factory...<sup>71</sup>

This evidence shows the reluctance of Chinese merchants to follow Sonora's labor law. The exclusive hiring of Chinese workers in Chinese businesses had played an important role in this group's economic success and community formation in Mexico, and these immigrants

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<sup>70</sup> Wilbur J. Carn for Sec. of State to American Consul General Alexander W. Weddell, (March 26, 1928), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/54a, enclosure, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>71</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, National Archives Record Group 59, 812.504/193, The Ohio State University Libraries.

subsequently refused to renegotiate this business practice even as the revolutionary growth of nationalism and xenophobia increasingly demanded such changes.

Recall that one Chinese adaptation strategy involved reliance on group cohesion and mutual aid societies. Chinese residents would also continue to depend on this tactic after the onslaught of Mexican hostility. For instance, while commenting about Tampico in 1924, James B. Stewart stated, “There are probably 3,000 Chinese in Tampico and vicinity and also a Chinese Chamber of Commerce, which has been quite active in the past year or so in looking after the interests of its members.”<sup>72</sup> In 1926, Bartley F. Yost described actions of the Chinese National League in requesting that the Chinese Minister in Mexico City demand protection from the federal government of Mexico.<sup>73</sup> In addition to confronting Mexican authorities via these groups, Chinese immigrants also relied on group representation in asking U.S. residents and officials for help. For instance, the Fraternal Union of Nogales approached Consular Agent Dyer in 1919 in order to discuss U.S. protection of Chinese interests.<sup>74</sup> In 1924, two Chinese merchants from Torreon who represented Chinese-Mexicans in that city requested the “moral support” of the U.S. Consulate, and this request further demonstrates these immigrants’ group mentality.<sup>75</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Chinese residents also turned to U.S. officials’ support, and this move also reflected successful economic relationships between these two groups. In order to

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<sup>72</sup> James B. Stuart to Sec. of State, (March 31, 1924), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/6, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>73</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (Jan. 8, 1926), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/16, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>74</sup> Dyer to Secretary of State, (Dec. 28, 1919), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/17, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>75</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (Aug. 21, 1924), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/10, The Ohio State University Libraries.



place this strategy in context and to elucidate the powerful position of U.S. interests in Mexico, it is important to review the very different circumstances and situations that faced U.S. interests and immigrants to Mexico.

As it had with Chinese immigrants, political acceptance of foreign presence in Mexico encouraged citizens of the United States to invest their time and capital in this country, especially during the Porfiriato. By 1910, 28,639 U.S. citizens had immigrated to Mexico, and they constituted Mexico's largest foreign minority at the time.<sup>76</sup> Vázquez and Meyer detail the substantial amount of U.S. capital that investors often placed in Mexican railroad and oil endeavors, and these authors signal this investment as one cause of U.S. immigration to Mexico.<sup>77</sup>

The federal government of the United States often ensured the dominant acceptance of these U.S. citizens and U.S. investments. For instance, ambassador Henry Lane Wilson meddled extensively in Mexican politics in 1913 in order to both remove Mexican president Francisco Madero from power and to bring about a regime that could protect U.S. lives and interests.<sup>78</sup> Some U.S. Consular Agents even resorted to militaristic measures in order to protect U.S. investments. Consular agents called in naval support in order to stifle strikes at a U.S. owned company in 1917 and in order to quell anti-foreign antipathies in 1913.<sup>79</sup> Other instances of intervention by the United States' government on behalf of its citizens in Mexico were destined

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<sup>76</sup> Report by Charles W. Lewis, Jr. entitled, "Population and Area of Mexico," (Oct. 3, 1927), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5011/15, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>77</sup> Josephina Zoraida Vázquez and Lorenzo Meyer, *The United States and Mexico* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 73, 90-2, 97, 123, 152.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-8.

<sup>79</sup> Dawson to Sec. of State, (April 26, 1917), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.504/85 The Ohio State University Libraries; Claude E. Guyant to Sec. of State, (Dec. 20, 1913), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.00/10441, The Ohio State University Libraries.

to continue throughout the 1920's and into the 1930's, even after the conclusion of the relatively violent stages of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>80</sup> Figure 4 presents an entertaining look at the wide, undeniable base of U.S. power in this country.

Given this overwhelming display of force on the of part a non-threatening power in Mexico, it is not difficult to imagine why Chinese immigrants would have viewed U.S. presence as potentially beneficial, and appeals by Chinese immigrants to U.S. officials follow such logic. In September of 1911, Consular Agent Luther T. Ellsworth reported that an angry mob of citizens in Ciudad Porfirio Diaz broke doors and windows of buildings owned by Chinese, U.S., Spanish, and other foreign populations. According to his report, these immigrant groups each asked for the help of the Consular Agent, who wrote a letter to municipal president Rafael Muzquiz.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Josephina Zoraida Vázquez and Lorenzo Meyer, *The United States and Mexico* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 130-2, 137-8, 147-9.

<sup>81</sup> Luther T. Ellsworth to Sec. of State, (Sept. 17, 1911), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.00/2365, enclosure, The Ohio State University Libraries.



*Figure 4 (above)*

*Chinese immigrants did not have to look far to find a possible source of power and protection.*<sup>82</sup>

Statements from Chinese refugees in 1916 further demonstrate this trend of Chinese immigrants appealing to U.S. forces for help. In that year, Consular Agent Blocker claimed to receive a credible report from an intelligence officer working for the United States Army. The report states that, “Chinese refugees from Jimenez continue to report general massacre [of]

<sup>82</sup> For Figure 4, see: Luther T. Ellsworth to Sec. of State, (March 22, 1911), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.00/1082, enclosure, The Ohio State University Libraries.

compatriots, Arabs, Spaniards, Japanese, and one American, who was burned at the stake.”<sup>83</sup>

The complete accuracy of such a claim seems questionable; it is difficult to believe that U.S. officials who were willing to call in naval support in order to stifle strikes (see above) would tolerate such grotesque violence against one of their citizens. It is also reasonable to conclude, however, that Chinese refugees stood to gain from contact with a powerful ally who also felt threatened by Mexicans. So even though the Chinese informants probably exaggerated the claims regarding the torture of a U.S. citizen, this report provides an instructive look at one way that Chinese citizens could perhaps indirectly appeal to U.S. power. U.S. influence in Mexico unquestionably encouraged Chinese citizens to seek aid from this source.

For their part, U.S. agents and even the U.S. government often responded favorably to Chinese appeals. Antagonized Chinese citizens in both Cananea and Guaymas asked for U.S. support in 1919 and 1920, respectively. When the municipal president of Cananea ordered the closing of all Chinese merchant operations by January 1, 1920, representatives from the Chinese Fraternal Union asked Consul Dyer to intercede on their behalf. Dyer subsequently wrote a letter to Sonoran Governor Adolfo de la Huerta on behalf of the Chinese in Cananea.<sup>84</sup> In response to similar pleas for protection from Chinese residents of Guaymas, Consular Agent Bartley F. Yost even shared a meeting with the municipal president of Guaymas in which the former advocated for Chinese rights.<sup>85</sup> While working in Ciudad Juarez, Consular Agent Edwards informed both Chinese and Japanese citizens in 1911 that his Consulate would take care of them if danger

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<sup>83</sup> Blocker to Sec. of State, (Nov. 18, 1916), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.00/19907, The Ohio State University Libraries

<sup>84</sup> Dyer to Sec. of State, (Dec. 28, 1919), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/17, The Ohio State University Libraries

<sup>85</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (Jan. 15, 1920), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/22, The Ohio State University Libraries.

arose.<sup>86</sup> Demonstrating a similar pattern of interaction between these groups, Consular Agent Carothers in Torreon reported that after the massacre of Chinese citizens in May of 1911, residents from the U.S. donated money in order to feed the Chinese refugees.<sup>87</sup> Other reports claimed that Carothers even went as far as sheltering thirty Chinese citizens in his home.<sup>88</sup> In September of 1919, the U.S. Secretary of State sent these instructions to every U.S. Consular Agent in Mexico:

At request [of the] Chinese Legation here, you are instructed, in case of necessity, to exercise your informal good offices with local Mexican authorities in behalf of Chinese in your District seeking protection.<sup>89</sup>

Why would the U.S. representatives and authorities in Mexico lend a hand to Chinese immigrants? Certainly political thinking in the United States featured no component of Chinese favoritism; the 1882 Exclusion Act prohibiting Chinese workers from entering the country proves this point. Perhaps the answer lies in both Hu-Dehart's and Duncan's revelations of the economic ties between these two groups. Not only did Chinese merchants often supply U.S. mining interests, but they also enjoyed a business relationship with commercial suppliers in the United States.<sup>90</sup>

Another answer to the question of the seemingly Janus-faced policies of U.S. officials towards Chinese immigrants may lie in the failure of U.S. representatives to ultimately protect

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<sup>86</sup> Edwards to Assistant Sec. of State, (April 27, 1911), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.00/1576, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>87</sup> Carothers to Sec. of State, (May 22, 1911), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.00/1968 The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>88</sup> J.B. Moore for Sec. of State to Chargé d'Affaires of China, (Aug. 29, 1913), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.00/8538, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>89</sup> Sec. of State to American Consular Officers in Mexico, (Sept. 30, 1919), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.00/23846, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>90</sup> Evelyn Hu-Dehart, "On Coolies and Shopkeepers: The Chinese as *Huagong* (Laborers) and *Huashang* (Merchants) in Latin America/Caribbean," in *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas*, ed. Wanni W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee, 78-111 (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 94-5.; Robert. H. Duncan. "The Chinese and the Economic Development of Northern Baja California, 1889-1929," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (Nov., 1994), 627, 640.

Chinese immigrants from further harassment. Despite the massive power of the U.S. government that backed its agents in Mexico, U.S. agents largely allowed their Mexican counterparts to ignore appeals on behalf of Chinese immigrants. For instance, even though Consul Dyer wrote letters to the governor of Sonora on behalf of Chinese citizens in Cananea in 1920, this agent states, “I have little hope that my appeal will be effective.”<sup>91</sup> This analysis proved to be correct, as only federal military intervention prevented Chinese expulsion. Similarly, in 1924, Bartley F. Yost responded to Chinese complaints regarding the propaganda campaign of the Torreon Liga Pro Raza by visiting with municipal president Sr. Ramon Farias, who subsequently promised to help to stop the campaign. However, these actions proved to be useless, as Mexican President Calles gave the anti-Chinese group his moral support a year later.<sup>92</sup> And even though U.S. establishments in 1929 Mexicali “joined their Chinese associates by rejecting the [CROM’s] demands” regarding enforcement of the 80% Mexican labor law, these U.S. businesses, as well as their Chinese counterparts, eventually decided to abide by the law.<sup>93</sup> Chinese citizens and groups often turned to U.S. power as a source of protection, but Mexican politics and popular thought responded coldly to this strategy. U. S. agents proved unwilling to force the development of real change in Mexican policy, and as a result, Chinese citizens dealt with discrimination and confrontation without much outside support.

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<sup>91</sup> Dyer to Sec. of State (Dec. 28, 1919), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/17, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>92</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec of State, (Aug. 21 1924 and July 8, 1925), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/10 and 812.4016/12, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>93</sup> Robert. H. Duncan. “The Chinese and the Economic Development of Northern Baja California, 1889-1929,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (Nov., 1994), 643.

### **Mexican Responses: Nationalistic Sentiments Solidify...**

Not surprisingly, dominant Mexican thought did not respond favorably to Chinese insistence on continuing familiar forms of cultural agency. In response to this trend, Mexicans largely increased the discrimination and harassment that had initially served as manifestations against Chinese cultural practices. For instance, Chinese reliance on support groups and mutual aid societies led to continued discrimination and racism against Chinese immigrants in Mexico's new political landscape. Rivalries between mutual aid societies such as the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chee Kung Tong (CKT) often led to the murders and denunciations of Chinese by other Chinese, and Mexicans did not fail to notice this development. In Sonora, some Mexicans exhibited racist ideologies by labeling Chinese citizens as “‘natural criminal elements,’” and Hu-Dehart details further the costs of this group reliance in Sonora when she claims that preoccupations with inter-group conflict left the mutual aid societies unable to protect members against Mexican political aggression.<sup>94</sup> Chinese employment of a familiar form of cultural agency, when combined with new, Mexican thought regarding these immigrants, ultimately led to continued, negative consequences for the Chinese.

The large scale exiling of Chinese immigrants from Mexico constituted another important consequence of continued cultural agency. These expulsions often resulted from Chinese insistence on maintaining their successful economic strategies. Robert Chao Romero cites general population statistics in attempting to show the scope of the expulsion campaigns in *The Dragon in Big Lusong*. While Chinese citizens in Mexico numbered 24,218 in 1926, this number

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<sup>94</sup> Evelyn Hu-Dehart, “Voluntary Associations in a Predominantly Male Immigrant Community: The Chinese on the Northern Mexican Frontier, 1880-1930,” in *Voluntary Associations in the Chinese Diaspora*, ed. Khun Eng Kuah-Pearce and Evelyn Hu-Dehart, 141-168 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 147-8.

had dropped to 4,856 by 1940.<sup>95</sup> Gómez Izquierdo's work offers more detail to describe the evolution of these expulsions. As Sonoran politicians centralized their national power with the creation of the PNR and the defeat of its enemies near the beginning of the 1930s, PNR party members began direct involvement in the anti-Chinese campaign. The new security of Sonoran power at a federal level allowed for the further execution of anti-Chinese policy in traditionally discriminatory states, as well as the expansion of the campaign to newer areas.<sup>96</sup> PNR party members also helped to form the Comité Directivo de la Compañía Nacionalista Antichina de la Cámara de Diputados, and the Mexican government sanctioned stringent, extreme application of the 1928 Ley de Migración.<sup>97</sup>

State and local persecutions of Chinese immigrants followed similar patterns, and many led to the expulsion of Chinese citizens. As Chinese in Sonora refused to comply with attempts to enforce the Social Prevision and Labor Law, the state's governor ordered all Chinese businesses to leave the state by September 5, and Jacques writes that, "The expulsion decree prompted many Chinese to close their shops and to sell all their goods" before being deported by authorities via cattle car.<sup>98</sup> 3,000 Chinese people had left the state by 1932, and the drastic nature of this number becomes apparent when we consider that only 3,517 Chinese men and 412 Chinese women resided in the state in 1930 (Gómez Izquierdo specifies here that many of the "Chinese women" were probably married Mexican women). By 1940, there were 92 Chinese

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<sup>95</sup> Robert Chao Romero, "The Dragon in Big Lusong: Chinese Immigration and Settlement in Mexico: 1882-1940," (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2003), 265-6.

<sup>96</sup> José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino en México (1871-1934)* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1991), 130.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 130-3.

<sup>98</sup> Leo M. Jacques. "Have Quick More Money than Mandarins: The Chinese in Sonora," *The Journal of Arizona History* 17, no. 2 (1976), 212-13.



citizens left in Sonora.<sup>99</sup> These displaced populations usually went to other Mexican states or to Arizona, and most that entered Arizona (or other locations in the United States) eventually returned to China.<sup>100</sup>

Sinaloa employed similar measures to reduce its Chinese populations, as widespread calls for Chinese citizens to obey that state's 90% labor law led to the governor's expulsion order in 1933. Anti-Chinese efforts in both Baja California and Chihuahua led the Chinese population in these three states (Sinaloa included) to drop from 6899 in 1930 to 1303 by 1940. In Coahuila, local anti-Chinese groups led the charge against Chinese citizens of that state, often forming physical blockades in front of Chinese business establishments in order to prevent them from making profits. That state's Chinese population dropped from 918 in 1930 to 256 in 1940. Precipitous drops in Chinese populations also occurred in Tamaulipas, Veracruz, and Chiapas.<sup>101</sup> The conflict between Chinese strategies of cultural agency and survival and Mexican expectations for these immigrants had clearly come to a breaking point, and the Mexicans attempted to settle the argument with increased racism, discrimination, and eventually the expulsion of Chinese citizens.

However, as Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent explain in their introduction to *Everyday Forms of State Formation*, the exercise of state power rarely takes the form of a one way street. Rather, a society (and its history) is better described as a constant struggle between

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<sup>99</sup> Philip A. Dennis, "Anti-Chinese Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico," *Ethnohistory* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1979), 69; José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino en México (1871-1934)* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1991), 139, 149.

<sup>100</sup> Jorge Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino en México (1871-1934)* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1991), 143; Philip A. Dennis, "Anti-Chinese Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico," *Ethnohistory* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1979), 69, 69.

<sup>101</sup> Jorge Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino en México (1871-1934)* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1991), 144-7, 149-51, 152-8.

popular and state propagated ideologies that results in a mixture of the two.<sup>102</sup> The same logic can be applied to Chinese immigrants to Mexico. While it may seem as though the Mexican state effectively crushed this community through continued harassment and eventually through expulsion, examples of Chinese negotiation emerge from these circumstances that prevent history from viewing these events in such black and white terms. For instance, Bartley F. Yost proves the agency of these immigrants by pointing out their economic power in a 1920 letter to the Secretary of State:

Confidently, it may be added that this agitation against the Chinese, at least as far as this district [Guaymas] is concerned, appears to come from State authorities, and is not by the wish or the agitation of the people in general, or even the municipal authorities, for the latter well know that if the Chinese merchants are driven out the city's revenues will be reduced at least 75%...<sup>103</sup>

Yost elaborates on similar themes in a 1925 letter that explains the lack of enforcement of Sonoran laws that called for the segregation of Chinese citizens into barrios. The consular agent claims that a reduction of tax payments would follow the “ruin” of Chinese merchants who were forced into barrios, and Yost even predicts that the consequences would “bankrupt” local and state governments.<sup>104</sup>

In “Have Quick More Money Than Mandarins,” Leo M. Jacques suggests that the Chinese immigrants realized the economic power suggested in Yost's letters. This author claims that Chinese control of grocery supplies and tax revenue allowed these immigrants to “cut off

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<sup>102</sup> Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, “Popular Culture and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico,” in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 17-18, 20-22.

<sup>103</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (Jan. 15, 1920), National Archives Records Group 59, 812.5593/22, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>104</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (July 8, 1925), National Archives Records Group 59, 812.4016/12, The Ohio State University Libraries.

supplies or to bribe officials” in advocating for better treatments.<sup>105</sup> This exercise of agency would have particularly important consequences when Sonoran authorities finally moved to enforce 80% labor laws in 1930. In order to protest this law, Chinese merchants in Sonora simply closed their doors, depriving municipal areas of food and economic revenue.<sup>106</sup> When this response elicited expulsion orders from Sonoran governor Francisco Elías, Chinese merchants attempted to sell all of their products in order to leave Mexico with as much money as possible. In the end, the exit of the Chinese merchants cost the Sonoran state treasury around 800,000 pesos per year, and Mexican taxes could recuperate only one-third of the amount that the Chinese had paid.<sup>107</sup> The departure of these immigrants also reduced Mexican food and agricultural products, and Dennis suggests that the “exodus” of these immigrants put the Bank of Sonora out of business and nearly bankrupted the state government.<sup>108</sup> Each of these examples show how, despite their apparent defeat at the hands of their Mexican antagonists, Chinese populations in Mexico could continue to negotiate for circumstances that would prove to be simultaneously beneficial to immigrant groups and detrimental to dominant, Mexican forces.

Throughout the process of their expulsion, Chinese immigrants also continued to exercise agency by negotiating for specific sexual privileges that would later prove to be disadvantageous for the Mexican state. This study will now detail the role of gender throughout the development of anti-Chinese sentiment in Mexico in order to properly contextualize this strategy.

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<sup>105</sup> Leo M. Jacques. “Have Quick More Money than Mandarins: The Chinese in Sonora,” *The Journal of Arizona History* 17, no. 2 (1976), 211-12.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 212. Charles C. Cumberland, “The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (May, 1960), 201-3.

<sup>107</sup> Leo M. Jacques. “Have Quick More Money than Mandarins: The Chinese in Sonora,” *The Journal of Arizona History* 17, no. 2 (1976), 215.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 215; Philip A. Dennis, “Anti-Chinese Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico,” *Ethnohistory* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1979), 67, 70.

## The Role of Gender

Gender played an important role in shaping the Chinese experience in Mexico. Chinese-Mexican intermarriages proved to be one important strategy in the survival of Chinese immigrants, and consular records confirm this idea. Bartley F. Yost described such a trend in 1924:

In the past not a few Chinese men married Mexican women, as only in rare cases do the Chinese bring their wives and families to Mexico. There are many illicit unions between Chinese men and Mexican women.<sup>109</sup>

Henry C.A. Damm similarly reports that, “Most Chinese are of the male sex, very few have families here, but marriages with Mexican women are not infrequent.”<sup>110</sup> Reed Paige Clark claimed that 1928 Chihuahua was the site of “considerable intermarriage.”<sup>111</sup> John E. Jones in Agua Prieta, Sonora also stated that by 1928, “No small number [of the Chinese immigrants] have naturalized as Mexican citizens and many have married native women.”<sup>112</sup>

Chinese intermarriage with Mexican women was one idea that particularly disturbed many Mexican citizens, and comments from disgruntled Mexicans themselves illustrate how this sentiment could develop into restrictive, legal action against this practice. The town council of Guaymas claimed that an important problem of Chinese immigration was, “...the injection of the sickly yellow blood which we fatally have to suffer in accepting it into our families.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Report from Bartley F. Yost entitled, “Mexican Women Prohibited from Marrying Chinese Men,” (Jan. 13, 1924), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/4, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>110</sup> Report from Henry C.A. Damm entitled, “Anti-Chinese Legislation by the State of Sonora, Mexico,” (Feb. 6, 1924) National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/5, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>111</sup> Report from Reed Paige Clark entitled, “Immigration of Chinese into Mexico,” (June 5, 1928), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/61, The Ohio State University Libraries; Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (July 8, 1925), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/12, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>112</sup> Report from John E. Jones entitled, “Immigration of Chinese into Mexico,” (April 18, 1928), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/59, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>113</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Secretary of State, (Dec. 25, 1919), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/19, The Ohio State University Libraries.

Consular Agent Francis J. Dyer similarly reported in 1920 that some Mexicans felt that Chinese immigrants were unclean, that they carried diseases, and that they were, “introducing oriental blood into the communities where they live.” According to Dyer, these claims served to supplement arguments that Chinese immigrants should be segregated.<sup>114</sup> Echoing these hostile feelings regarding these relationships, the State of Sonora passed a law in 1923 forbidding marriages and “illicit” unions between Mexican women and Chinese men.

In Chihuahua, “The Committee on Racial Welfare,” which claimed to be leading a “truly nationalist movement in favor of the race,” issued a circular that called for the coming together of men of Latin American blood. It also made opposite suggestions regarding unions with Chinese people, claiming that such unions represented, “a grave danger for the development and progress of our nation.”<sup>115</sup> In line with these sentiments, the state of Chihuahua officially outlawed intermarriage in 1932.

Torreon, Coahuila, was also the site of convergent measures of sexual discrimination. In this city, the “Liga Pro-Raza” held weekly meetings in which members directed citizens to discriminate against the Chinese via boycotts and excessive taxes. Yost claims that “...when the subject of marriages between Mexican women and Chinese men [was] broached [at the meetings], the excitement of the crowd [reached] a dangerous degree, and [was] liable to lead to violence.”<sup>116</sup> In 1925, some Mexican citizens of Torreon proposed a law against intermarriage

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<sup>114</sup> Dyer to Sec. of State, (Jan. 29, 1920), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/23, The Ohio State University Libraries

<sup>115</sup> Thomas McEnnley to Sec. of State, (June 23, 1924), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/8, enclosure, The Ohio State University Libraries

<sup>116</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (Aug. 24, 1924), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/10, The Ohio State University Libraries.

similar to that of Sonora.<sup>117</sup> In a society where physical violence, economically disruptive behavior, and legal action against both Chinese citizens and their adaptation strategies had become commonplace, not even Chinese sexual practices escaped the threatening scrutiny of Mexican manifestations of nationalism and xenophobia.

Similar to the ways in which they continued to practice familiar economic and group-cohesion strategies, Chinese men exhibited an unwillingness to change their behaviors or to compromise with their Mexican dominators when faced with laws propagating sexual discrimination. Instead, many Chinese men continued their relations with Mexican women. Bartley F. Yost proves this as he details the results of Sonora's restriction on intermarriage, saying, "[the restriction] has given rise to clandestine unions."<sup>118</sup> The U.S. Consul in Mexico City supported this assertion in a 1928 report, claiming, "...despite the [Sonoran] State law, there is considerable intermarriage between Chinese and natives."<sup>119</sup> Additional evidence would be useful in speaking to this trend both inside and outside of Sonora. However, it is difficult to imagine that Chinese men without wives (in Mexico) would gladly acquiesce to discriminatory legislation in *any* state. Again, Chinese immigrants' tendency to balk at proposed changes to their intimate relationships echo similar tendencies to maintain successful adaptation strategies in spite of the emergence of hostile threats to such tactics.

Restrictive changes in Chinese-Mexican intermarriage laws also discriminated against the Mexican women who were involved in these culturally diverse relations, and discrimination

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<sup>117</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (July 8, 1925), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/12, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>118</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (July 8, 1925), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/12, The Ohio State University Libraries

<sup>119</sup> Report from Reed Paige Clark entitled, "Immigration of Chinese Into Mexico," (June 5, 1928), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/61, The Ohio State University Libraries.

against women had precedence in Mexican gender history. Even before the advent of Chinese-Mexican intermarriages, Mexican women rarely received equal rights and considerations vis-à-vis men in Mexican society. Mexican legal discourse proves this society's often discriminatory and protectionist stances towards women. Acting as Mexico's executive authority, Venustiano Carranza published a law in 1917 concerning family relations. While some clauses within this law attempted to establish equality in the home between men and women, other decrees called for sharply divided gender roles. For instance, Carranza's law signaled men as the primary income owners of households. While it permitted women to supplement family incomes, the law stipulated that women's contributions should only account for half of the family's total earnings. Carranza gave power over household affairs and child rearing to women.<sup>120</sup> It is easy to surmise that such prevalent notions of specific gender roles in Mexican society could lead to feelings of inequality amongst parties who wished to cross gendered boundaries. The Queretaro Constitution of 1917, a document that would serve as the foundation for Mexico's post-revolutionary government, further propagated discriminatory and protectionist stances towards women at a federal level as it specifically prohibited the performance of "dangerous" labor by both women and children.<sup>121</sup>

Discrimination against women was also common in the discourse of state governments, and such a trend can be discerned from state policies on divorce. For instance, Sonoran law in 1928 stipulated that the act of adultery by a wife was always cause for divorce, while adultery by a husband required further circumstances in order to make divorce legitimate (these

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<sup>120</sup> Consul (Name Illegible) to Sec. of State, June 1917, National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4054/3, enclosure, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>121</sup> Parker to Sec. of State, Feb 7, 1917, National Archives Records Group 59, 812.011/31, enclosure, The Ohio State University Libraries.

circumstances included instances in which the husband committed adultery in the home he shares with his wife). Men could also file for divorce if their wives gave birth to “illegitimate” children that were conceived prior to the marriage, and Sonoran law stipulated that women who gained custody of their children following divorces could lose this privilege if they later gave birth to an illegitimate child. And while the legal discourse forced women to wait 300 days after their divorce in order to remarry, no such law appears to have applied to males. Finally, Sonoran law displayed ideas of protectionism towards women as it required husbands to work in order to provide their ex-wives with food. Not surprisingly, this stipulation hinged on the woman’s willingness to lead an “honest life” and remain unmarried.<sup>122</sup>

Legal policies didn’t treat Mexican women much better in other states. For instance, divorce legislation in Tobasco in 1926 required a 180 day “waiting period” similar to that of Sonora for women who wished to remarry.<sup>123</sup> Yucatan law in 1923 required 300 days.<sup>124</sup> Each of these examples shows how state-level policies could help to perpetuate unequal treatment of women in Mexican society.

Even comments from individual Mexicans point to women’s second class treatment. Statements published in El Borchazo, a bi-weekly Mexican newspaper, prove this point:

When you eat at a Chinese restaurant, or when you have your clothes washed at a Chinese laundry, you are helping the enemies of the *poor* Mexican woman (emphasis my own).<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Herbert S. Bursley to Sec. of State, Feb. 5, 1928, National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4054/76, enclosure, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>123</sup> Harry B. Ott to Secretary of State, June 8, 1926, National Archives Records Group 59, 812.4054/57, enclosure. The Ohio State University Libraries

<sup>124</sup> “English Translation: Law of Divorce and Reforms to the Civil Register Code and to the Civil Code of the State,” 1923, National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4054/15, The Ohio State University Libraries

<sup>125</sup> Report from Harold C. Wood entitled, “Public Feeling in Sonora with Regard to the Chinese,” (July 23, 1923), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.4016/2, The Ohio State University Libraries.



By calling for Mexicans to protect their women at the expense of the Chinese, such a statement displays aspects of paternalism and gender inequality in Mexican society. A handbill issued by the Municipal President of Guaymas in the same year more blatantly expresses dominant perceptions of women in Mexican society. In the handbill, the council of Guaymas argues that Chinese men have invaded, "...not only the labor belonging to the strong sex, but also that which is of woman..."<sup>126</sup> It is clear from these examples that gender discrimination in Mexico existed on federal, state, and local/individual levels.<sup>127</sup>

As a result of the conflict over Mexican-Chinese cultural and gender relations, discrimination against Mexican women only intensified. According to Gómez Izquierdo, Mexican women lost their nationality in Mexico when they married Chinese men. This point substantiates the author's later, concordant claim that population statistics of Chinese women in Mexico could be distorted by Mexican women that authorities simply counted as Chinese. This loss of women's citizenship would be one form of continued harassment against Chinese-Mexican families that would prove to have important effects on subsequent cultural negotiations between immigrant groups and the Mexican state.<sup>128</sup>

Conflictive Chinese-Mexican gender relations would continue as Chinese men took their Mexican wives and children back to China following their expulsion. In order to better understand the consequences of the Chinese departure on Mexican gender relations, it would be

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<sup>126</sup> Bartley F. Yost to Sec. of State, (Dec. 25, 1919), National Archives Record Group 59, 812.5593/19, The Ohio State University Libraries.

<sup>127</sup> For more about Mexican paternalism, machoism, and gender roles, see Octavio Paz's essay, "The Son's of La Malinche," Roger Barta's essay, "Does it Mean Anything to be a Mexican?" and Matthew C. Gutmann's extensive anthropological work on the topic, The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City.

<sup>128</sup> Julia Maria Schiavone Camacho, "Traversing Boundaries: Chinese, Mexicans, and Chinese Mexicans in the Formation of Gender, Race, and Nation in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands," (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas El Paso, 2006), 164-6, 168-70.

beneficial to review the circumstances that faced Mexican women in China. In “Traversing Boundaries: Chinese, Mexicans, and Chinese Mexicans in the Formation of Gender, Race, and Nation in the Twentieth Century U.S.-Mexican Borderlands,” Julia Maria Schiavone Comacho completes a thorough analysis of these circumstances. In describing Mexican women who left Mexico to return with their husbands to China, this author cites Mexican Honorary Vice Consul in Shanghai Mauricio Fresco in describing these women “stateless.”<sup>129</sup> Mexican law, following a common trend in international foreign policy, forced Mexican women who married foreigners to accept citizenship in the spouse’s country and to give up Mexican citizenship.<sup>130</sup> Despite Chinese marriage laws that prohibited polygamy, Chinese social tradition encouraged this practice, and China simultaneously deprived Mexican women of citizenship by only acknowledging a man’s first marriage as legitimate.<sup>131</sup>

To exacerbate the situation of the 600 women who immigrated to China between 1931 and 1933, social conditions in China remained less than ideal. Schiavone Camacho’s research suggests that many Chinese citizens were angry at Mexicans and Mexican society for the poor treatment of their comrades in Mexico. As a result, Mexican women became likely targets for discrimination in Chinese society.<sup>132</sup> Chinese men did not always prove willing to soften the impacts of this discrimination; Mexican women repeatedly complained to consuls about poor treatment and abandonment by their husbands.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Julia Maria Schiavone Camacho, “Traversing Boundaries: Chinese, Mexicans, and Chinese Mexicans in the Formation of Gender, Race, and Nation in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas El Paso, 2006), 141.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 155-6.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 158-9.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 142, 148.

To be certain, not all Mexican women were treated poorly by their Chinese husbands in China. Schiavone Camacho details instances of committed relationships that continued in China.<sup>134</sup> However, many of those who did feel that their treatment in China had become intolerable eventually resorted to their own forms of creative agency in rectifying this situation. For instance, many immigrated away from their husband's smaller towns and families and into larger metropolitan cities like Macao, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Nanking.<sup>135</sup> These larger cities offered economic opportunities, easy access to ports with ships returning to Mexico, multiethnic populations that could make Mexican women feel less foreign, and the protection of nearby consulates.<sup>136</sup> These consulate services would play a huge role in another strategy of these women: direct appeal for protection and repatriation to Mexico. Mexican women continued to complain about their treatment in China, and they similarly began to ask consular services to allow them to return to Mexico.<sup>137</sup>

Partially owing to the task of gaining international legitimacy, the Mexican state would be forced to intervene on behalf of the very citizens whose families it had earlier expelled from Mexico.<sup>138</sup> Many Mexican women did eventually return to their native land, and these repatriations followed important changes in the policy of Mexico's federal government regarding these women. By 1932, the government had decided that Mexican marriages with Chinese men were invalid if the man had already been legally married in China. In accordance with this policy, these women remained Mexican citizens, and gained access to consulate protection and

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 170-1.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 143

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 142-3.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 148, 164,

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 164-6, 168-70.

passport rights.<sup>139</sup> By 1937, the Mexican government under the leadership of Lorenzo Cardenas allocated 94,000 pesos to pay for the repatriation of nearly 400 mistreated Mexican women and Chinese-Mexican children. Schiavone-Camacho's work suggests that a primary inspiration for this action was the prospect of war between China and Japan and the negative consequences for Mexican women in China that would result.<sup>140</sup> By bargaining for their return to Mexico, these women show how even subalterns who are expelled from a country can continue to engage in negotiations with dominant power.

However, while many of these women and children did successfully return to Mexico, Schiavone-Camacho seems accurate in claiming that Mexico's gender policy still refused to fully consider Mexican women's concerns. Not only did Cardenas' repatriation program not include the Chinese men who comprised important parts of some Chinese-Mexican families, but many Mexican women again faced discriminatory treatment upon return to their homeland.<sup>141</sup> Mexican stereotypes regarding the prevalence of diseases in China led health authorities to detain Mexican women and their children in port cities for extensive periods of time, and labels of "diseased" and "foreign" could follow Mexican women and their children as they attempted to reintegrate themselves into Mexican society.<sup>142</sup> As the author herself keenly points out, the actions of women in creating discourse surrounding their eventual repatriation "influenced ideas of citizenship and nationality, as well as foreign policy, during this crucial period in Mexico's national and international formation."<sup>143</sup> It is clear that gender issues played an important role in shaping the Chinese experience in Mexico. Not only did relationships with Mexican women

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 159-60.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 168-70.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 177-9.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 180.

help Chinese men to find prosperity in a new country, but the eventual repatriation of Mexican women (courtesy of the Mexican government) proves that these Chinese-Mexican families could continue to negotiate with state power even through a process of expulsion.

## **Conclusions**

Porfirio Diaz and dominant Mexican political thought had largely welcomed the immigration of Chinese citizens for economic reasons during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup>. This group developed into a viable, stable community by defying Mexican discourse of Chinese citizens as wage laborers, by forming mutual aid societies, and by forming relationships with Mexican women. However, as social revolution changed ideologies in Mexico from xenophilia to nationalism tinted with xenophobia, these strategies, negotiations, and bargains that had allowed for Chinese prosperity in this country became antithetic to Mexican political thought. These developments placed Chinese citizens in a drastic, oppressed position, and as a result, these immigrants encountered physical, economic, and legal assault.

In response to such threats, Chinese immigrants unsuccessfully appealed to both Mexican and U.S. authorities, and they also continued the familiar survival practices that had allowed them to initially adapt to their new surroundings. However, the intolerable nature of these techniques in contemporary Mexican thought ultimately led to a confrontation between Mexicans and Chinese, the latter refusing to discontinue their practices. In the end, many Chinese immigrants were forced to leave Mexico, but even this departure remained characterized

by adapted forms of cultural negotiations that simultaneously benefited the immigrants while irritating dominant thought.

To point out that Chinese immigrants initially refused to renegotiate their success in Mexico is not to blame these immigrants for their own demise. It is important to remember that nationalistic fervor in Mexico asked Chinese immigrants to renegotiate favorable circumstances and prosperity. To change business practices, sexual practices, and a tradition of group dependence that had been developing in response to Mexican socioeconomic conditions over a number of decades would have been both an improbable and impractical task. Additionally, it is difficult to surmise whether the explosion of nationalism in Mexico would have allowed the Chinese immigrants to reach *any* compromise in this situation. By 1938, Mexican nationalism and anti-foreign sentiment had even grown to such epic proportions as to encourage Mexican authorities to challenge a familiar tormentor, the United States, by nationalizing U.S. oil interests. The consequences for the Chinese community, if unable to be blamed on the Chinese themselves, more appropriately fit as the logical results of nationalistic insistence on an end to the strategies and practices that had made foreign groups like the Chinese so successful.

This study suggests direction for further research. The correspondences of the U.S. Consular Agents, which serve as the work's most important primary sources, illuminate U.S. perspectives regarding these events, and they also provide a limited look at Mexican perspectives through first-hand observations of demonstrations, translations of speeches and newspapers, etc. However, their weakness lies in their obvious pro-U.S. sentiments (recall that U.S. thought varied widely from time to time regarding Chinese people), as well as in their inability to directly communicate the unfiltered thoughts and words of Chinese citizens. A useful follow-up to this

investigation could focus on sources that relay the direct, personal perspectives of both the Chinese and Mexican participants in these events.

Regional expansion of the study could also enhance its claims. Due to the wide availability of evidence regarding immigrant groups who settled in northern Mexican states, this study focuses mainly on these regions. However, Chinese populations also settled in areas that this study largely excludes, such as Yucatan and Chiapas. Future investigations could elaborate upon the consequences of revolutionary changes for immigrants in these states. It is also important to remember that discrimination against Chinese citizens was not uniformly witnessed throughout all of Mexico; Robert H. Duncan repeatedly states that Chinese in Northern Baja California, for instance, usually received better treatment than their neighbors in Sonora. His research shows that, contrary to Mexican perceptions of Chinese residents in Sonora, Chinese immigrants in Baja participated in a wide range of economic ventures.<sup>144</sup> Further studies could examine what, if any, connection exists between economic function of Chinese residents and levels of discrimination against them in a wider range of Mexican states and regions.

This work, then, presents a basic examination of the strategies of cultural negotiation that allowed a particular immigrant group to survive in the radically different circumstances of a new country. While Chinese strategies made them initially successful in Mexico, shifting Mexican discourse during and after the Mexican Revolution made these strategies targets for violence, racism, and discrimination. Chinese citizens initially declined to renegotiate their behavioral patterns as changes in the world around them made these strategies largely untenable: such a

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<sup>144</sup> Robert. H. Duncan. "The Chinese and the Economic Development of Northern Baja California, 1889-1929," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (Nov., 1994), 616, 630, 643.

renegotiation would have required excessive and impractical changes on the part of the Chinese immigrants. As a result of their refusal to change their successful practices, Mexican state power forced many Chinese citizens to leave the country, but many of these immigrants managed to undertake a final, different form of cultural negotiation by emigrating away from Mexico on their own terms. While further investigation can undoubtedly add relevant perspective and extra detail, the study adds to historical scholarship examples of agency and adaptation strategies that prove both effective and subject to change at divergent historical moments.



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